

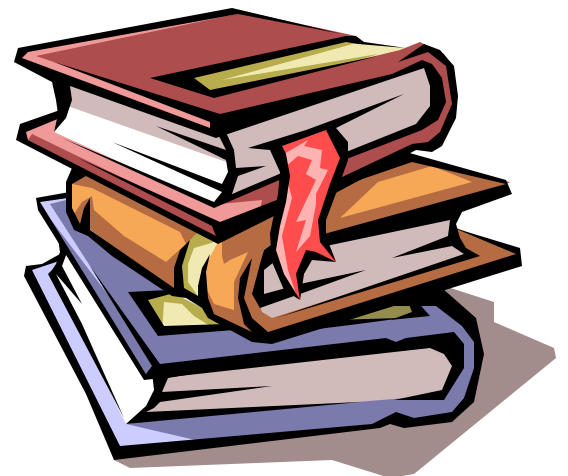


# THE --- NEXT STEP

A BLUEPRINT FOR  
CONTINUED EDUCATION  
REFORM IN ARKANSAS

BY GOVERNOR MIKE  
HUCKABEE

JANUARY 8, 2002





STATE OF ARKANSAS  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

State Capitol  
Little Rock 72201

Mike Huckabee  
Governor

January 8, 2002

Dear Fellow Arkansan:

Almost 70 percent of state tax dollars are spent on education. Are additional reforms needed that can create better results for the students in our public schools and institutions of higher learning?

I believe the answer to that question is yes. We've instituted some bold changes in education in recent years under the banners of Smart Start and Smart Step. Now it's time to take the Next Step.

Next Step is a visionary proposal to not only advance our existing reforms but also make additional changes. These reforms are designed to produce concrete results.

We didn't wait for a court decision to begin making significant changes in education standards and expectations. Our reforms already have moved public education forward. But the recent court decision makes it obvious we need to take our schools to an even higher level. It's with a sense of urgency I present these ideas for consideration by the Legislature, educators and, most importantly, the parents of our students.

The Legislature was willing to work with us as we launched Smart Start and Smart Step. More than ever, we'll need legislators who are willing to join us in taking the Next Step.

What follows is an outline of the proposals you'll be hearing about during the next several months as we prepare for the 2003 legislative session. I hope you're ready to join us in taking the Next Step.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Huckabee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" and last name "Huckabee" clearly distinguishable.

Mike Huckabee

MH:st

# THE --- NEXT STEP

## A BLUEPRINT FOR CONTINUED EDUCATION REFORM IN ARKANSAS

BY GOVERNOR MIKE HUCKABEE

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- ❖ **Professional Staff Accountability and Compensation**
- ❖ **Academic Standards, Curriculum and Teaching Methods**
- ❖ **Communicating Results to All Stakeholders**
- ❖ **Broaden the State's Charter School Law**
- ❖ **Financial Reporting**
- ❖ **Improved Pre-School and Health Care Access for Children**
- ❖ **Inclusion and Expansion of Broad-based Opportunities for Students in the Arts**
- ❖ **Develop Partnerships between Business, Industry, Postsecondary Schools, Workforce Education, and Public Schools**

## ❖ **Professional Staff Accountability and Compensation**

- Develop and implement a system which bases continued employment and increase in compensation to student progress and market demand:
  - Reward all certified staff (inclusive of teachers, specialized staff, and administrators) with annual salary increases based on specified accountability measures appropriate for their duty areas.
  - Employ appropriate and timely measures for certified staff who do not meet accountability criteria. Revise the Teacher Fair Dismissal Act to provide proper balance between protection of academic freedom and academic performance of students.
  - Offer stipends or additional pay to certified staff in shortage areas such as mathematics, special education, foreign language, science, English as a Second Language, or for academically distressed schools. Continue and expand incentives for teachers such as National Board Certification and increased compensation for teachers whose students show significant measurable academic improvement.
  - Establish professional development requirements for teacher educators based on state curriculum frameworks and statewide education initiatives.
  - Increase accountability for retention and graduation of students at the postsecondary level.
  - Reorganize state scholarships as loan/scholarship funds in which failure to graduate in six years would deem it a loan. Graduation within six years would result in the loan being classified as a scholarship with no repayment. (Allow waivers for extenuating circumstances.)
  - Expand the alternative compensation programs for teachers, such as the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), across the state.
  - Promote the awareness of the School Workers Defense Program.

## ❖ **Academic Standards, Curriculum and Teaching Methods**

- Implement a system which better assures that all students have equal opportunity to achieve:
  - Restructure the current Arkansas testing system to include annual spring testing, creating valid student academic achievement growth comparisons from year to year and reporting results to stakeholders and taxpayers.
  - Monitor schools more closely to assure consistency in what is taught and what is mandated within the state standards. An even more intense level of

assistance would be provided in staff development on student performance through the Smart Start and Smart Step initiatives.

- Continue and expand the PATHWISE teacher preparation program by creating a network of educators who specialize in successful delivery of standards in the classroom, who would become mentors in their own schools to assist other teachers.
- Expedite and expand the process of the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP), which allows the state to intervene more quickly when districts are not performing academically or fiscally.
- Require schools to set consequences for individual student accountability on testing.
- Increase the course requirements for all high school graduates to demonstrate a level of rigor throughout the entire high school experience. (Example: Four math units would be required for all students.)
- Expand opportunities for local colleges to offer concurrent credit in the high schools with a goal of enabling high school graduates the ability to have earned an associate degree by the end of grade twelve.
- Establish higher entry criteria for four-year colleges and universities.
- Offer remedial courses through the two-year colleges only.
- Align the curricula for high school courses, two-year colleges, and four-year universities.

#### ❖ **Communicating Results to All Stakeholders**

- Expand the Arkansas School Report Card system, which assures parents, businesses patrons, and educators receive current comparison information across the state, as well as school to school and district to district comparison.
  - Provide useful, timely academic performance data specifically concerning students, class (grade level), classroom teacher, and school to parents and educators.
  - Continue to expand the current annual report card to parents, businesses, and constituents, including current comparison information across the state, as well as school to school and district to district comparison.
- Improve the communication and understanding of needed course requirements for high school students to graduate and enter postsecondary schools:
  - Improve the communication and understanding of needed course requirements for high school students to graduate and enter postsecondary schools. Guidelines for this process would be established for all high school counselors.
  - Develop relationships between college recruiters and high schools.

### ❖ **Broaden the State's Charter School Law**

- Increase the methods which enhance school choice alternatives for parents and students:
  - Increase the number of open enrollment charter schools allowed by law.
  - Develop facilities funding for charter schools.
  - Continue to give charter schools flexibility, but hold them to rigorous performance standards.
  - Encourage more organizers to be authorizers such as colleges, universities and non-profit organizations.

### ❖ **Financial Reporting**

- Implement a user friendly standardized accounting system for all school districts, which is easily understood by constituents:
  - Spending categories would become part of the accountability program for school districts.
  - Results would be published as part of the Arkansas School Report Card information provided to parents and patrons.
  - Establish standards determining percentage of district funds which must be used for actual classroom instruction.

### ❖ **Improved Pre-School and Health Care Access for Children**

- Implement expanded educational opportunities for pre-school including emphasis for reading, and access to health and dental care:
  - Assure access to Head Start, ABC, or other education-based quality pre-school programs.
  - Increase phonics based reading opportunities for preschool age children.
  - Increase adult literacy to assist in creating an “education friendly” environment for children in the home.
  - Increase readiness to learn by improving access and utilization of basic health care, with attention given to visual, aural, and dental health as well as basic health care.

❖ **Inclusion and Expansion of Broad-based Opportunities for Students in the Arts**

- Develop and implement a statewide strategy to assure students of opportunities to become proficient in music, the visual arts, theater, or other fine arts:
  - Expand standards for music instruction for children in K-12.
  - Develop a residential high school for exceptional high school students in the performing and fine arts in conjunction with the Arkansas School for Math and Science.
  - Establish standards for access for all students for visual arts and theater.

❖ **Develop Partnerships between Business, Industry, Postsecondary Schools, Workforce Education, and Public Schools**

- Expand courses at the high school level that would enable students to develop workforce skills needed in today's technological environment:
  - Make programs such as EAST and CISCO available in all high schools.
  - Provide more opportunities for postsecondary schools or Workforce Education's technical institutes to participate with high schools in special training programs.
  - Expand partnership between public schools and teacher education programs to create more classroom experiences for teachers-in-training and more opportunities for instructors/professors to interact with students in public school classrooms.